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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY REPORT - May 26, 2006

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11. The following are brief items of interest compiled by
Embassy Minsk.

International Relations

12. Iran To Aid Belarus' Nuclear Industry, Lukashenko To Visit Iran

On May 25, Iranian Ambassador Abdolhamid Fekri said at a news conference in Minsk that Iran might assist Belarus in building a nuclear power plant. Fekri said that assistance would comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. He described Iran's nuclear research programs as peaceful and designed to foster economic and scientific development. Fekri also announced that Belarusian President Lukashenko will visit Iran and meet with President Mahmud Ahmadinejad. The ambassador said that trade and economic relations would be discussed during the visit and that the Iranian president would pay a return visit to Belarus if he received an invitation. Fekri noted that Belarus and Iran have similar positions on many international issues and both oppose a unipolar world.

13. Moldovan, Georgian Wines To Stay on Shelves

On May 19, Mikhail Rimzha, Belarus' chief sanitary expert, told reporters that Georgian and Moldovan wines would not be banned in Belarus. Russia recently alleged that the wines contain high levels of pesticides and suspended imports from Moldova and Georgia. Although Belarus has no pesticide standards for wine Rimzha said that Belarusian experts tested 3,000 samples of Georgian and Moldovan wines and found between 10 and 100 times less pesticide than the maximum allowable level for juices. Rimzha also ordered testing of Georgia's Borjomi mineral water, which Russia has banned.

Post-Elections

14. Belarusian Popular Front Headquarters Vandalized

On May 23, vandals splashed black paint on the door of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) headquarters in Minsk and painted symbols for the Russian National Bolsheviks on the pavement in front of its entrance. Vandals also splashed the nearby office of the Francisak Skaryna Belarusian Language Society (BLS). Vintsuk Vyachorka, BPF Chairman, stated, "Our headquarters is watched around the clock and the Police Academy is in the next building, but the vandals mysteriously managed to do their job." According to Vyachorka the BPF does not intend to report the incident to the police since past reports were ignored. Vyachorka remarked, "Secret services monitor opposition Web sites, searching for tips on

planned flash mobs and other protests by democratic forces. But they take little interest in communist fascist sites, on which National Bolsheviks openly boast of their acts."

Human Rights

15. Justice Ministry Seeks to Suspend Helsinki Committee

On May 26, Belarus' Justice Ministry filed suit with the Supreme Court to suspend the activities of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC). The Justice Ministry accuses the BHC of violating Belarusian law and its charter by sending non-members to observe the 2004 parliamentary elections, using residential premises as its legal address, and missing the deadline for paying taxes. BHC Chairperson Tatyana Protko described the suit as the "first reaction to the president's address to the nation and the legislature about the need for dialog between civil society and the government." Protko said that the authorities had dropped a tax evasion case against BHC but the Justice Ministry is still using that accusation in its suit.

Civil Society

16. Milinkevich Warned against Discrediting Belarus

On May 22, opposition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich was summoned to the Minsk City Prosecutor's Office where he was issued a warning regarding his March 31 interview with the Polish newspaper Rzeczpospolita. According to the prosecutor's office, Milinkevich accused Belarusian authorities of involvement in the death of the Polish Vice Consul in Grodno, Ryszard Badon-Lehr. Moreover, authorities questioned Milinkevich about an interview with BBC in which he allegedly characterized the presidential election in March

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as a coup and stated that Aleksandr Lukashenko had no right to run for a third term. The office warned Milinkevich that he might be subject to criminal prosecution and two years in prison for disseminating false information that discredited Belarus. Milinkevich maintains that he never said authorities were involved in the Polish Vice Consul's death but that they might have been involved.

17. Deputy Chairman of Belarusian Popular Front Released from Jail

On May 19, Belarusian authorities released Viktor Ivashkevich, Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), from jail following his 15-day term imposed for organizing an opposition demonstration on the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. The court found Ivashkevich guilty of organizing a demonstration. Ivashkevich was the sixth opposition leader jailed for the Chernobylski Shlyakh (Path of Chernobyl) demonstration. On April 27, former presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich, BPF Chairman Vintsuk Vyachorka, and union leader Aleksandr Bukhvostov were sentenced to 15 days in jail for their participation in the demonstration. Sergei Kalyakin, leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists, and youth opposition leader Dmitry Dashkevich received 14-day jail sentences.

18. Justice Ministry Ends Closure Suit against Writers Union

On May 22, the Belarusian Ministry of Justice withdrew its lawsuit to close the Union of Belarusian Writers (UBW). The Ministry charged the Union with organizing a conference of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Hramada" (BSDP) at the House of Writers cafeteria. Other charges included using the banned emblem Pahonya in the entrance sign for the House of Writers and using for four months a stamp featuring the Union's name without inverted commas. Proceedings began on April 6 but were adjourned on May 5 after the plaintiff failed to prove UBW's involvement with the conference. Within two weeks, the UBW removed the Pahonya emblem and fulfilled the two other demands.

¶9. Customs Officers Detain Viktor Karnienko

Authorities detained Viktor Karneenko, a former deputy chairman of Aleksandr Milinkevich's campaign headquarters and a member of the Political Council of Democratic Forces, at Minsk airport as he was traveling to Copenhagen for a conference on Belarus. Customs officers delayed the flight and inspected Karnienko's bag for an hour. According to Karnienko, officials were looking for documents but found nothing of interest.

¶10. Belarusian Prosecutor Says False Testimony Not Prosecutable

The prosecutor of Chyhunachny district of Gomel, G.N. Ramaniuk, stated that in administrative cases the law "does not envisage warning of citizens about accountability for false testimony" and therefore witnesses cannot be charged. Ramananiuk was answering an appeal by Vladimir Katsora, the head of presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich's campaign headquarters. Katsora asked the prosecutor's office to prosecute the deputy head of the police department of Chyhunachny district, S.V.Nyaznaeu, and two others for giving false testimony. Nyaznaeu, who was in charge of Katsora's detention, testified in the court that the activist resisted violently during the detention. Katsora awaits another appeal concerning his 15-day detention in connection to April's Path of Chernobyl protest.

¶11. Private Newspaper Warned by Information Ministry

In a letter to the editor dated May 12, the Belarusian Information Minister, Vladimir Rusakevich, accused the private Novopolotsk-based newspaper "Khimik" of publishing advertisements in several issues without verifying the advertisers' licenses in violation of Article 30 of the Media Law. Editor Sergey Balay described the warning as unfounded and plans to appeal to the Supreme Economic Court of Belarus. Last month the Novopolotsk Prosecutor's Office questioned Balay about claims from the local government's ideology office that the bi-weekly broke the law by changing publication periodicity, reprinting television programming without permission, publishing an opinion poll allegedly conducted by an unlicensed pollster and an interview with presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin.

Economy

¶12. Finished Product Inventories Up 31% from January through April

On May 21, Belarus' Ministry of Statistics and Analysis reported that industrial enterprises' finished product inventories increased by 31.3% in the first four months of 2006. As of April 1, inventories accounted for 58.3 percent of average monthly

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production. The largest proportion of unsold goods was in the textile, clothing, metalworking, machinery, and building-materials industries.

Quote of the Week

¶13. During his annual address to parliament, Aleksandr Lukashenko offered this insight regarding democracy and civic responsibility:

"The government will continue creating the most favorable conditions to enable our citizens to realize their ambitions and actively engage in state affairs. But it's well known that it is impossible to live in society and be free from it. This means that one should know not only how to govern but also how to obey."

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